Small School Districts:

A PLAN FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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July 31, 1987

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Task Force on Small School Districts in British Columbia was formed in February, 1987. Seven small school district superintendents and secretary-treasurers, and two Ministry of Education officials, are its members. Its role is to identify, study and make recommendations on the small school districts' special qualities and problems. The task force and this report is financed by the small school districts and the Ministry of Education.

The seventeen small school districts in British Columbia are the subject matter - that is, each of the Province's 75 school districts which enrols approximately 1,200 students or less. These seventeen districts, all rural and covering a disproportionately large area of B.C., are identified.

The purpose of the study is to re-examine the rationale for these districts, and to seek solutions for particular problems resulting from or accentuated by district smallness. The major conclusions and recommendations are:

* that small school districts are proven to be educationally effective, efficient and responsive to local needs in certain, geographic locations;
* that to maintain and improve the small school districts' unique contributions to the provincial provision of educational services requires increased, specialized consideration within government and the educational system;
* that the Ministry of Education establish a small school district office within the Ministry, to facilitate the districts' operations and to represent their interests and viewpoints;
* that regional service centres be established by small school districts with Ministry of Education assistance to help the districts share specialized information and services;
* that the Ministry of Education consider making a lasting commitment to improving the quality of education in small schools (elementary and secondary) through such initiatives as the Small Secondary Schools Project.

In addition, the report identifies several operational areas in which increased Ministry of Education assistance or funding could help small school districts fulfill their educational mandate. It also outlines ways in which the districts can help themselves in improving services to isolated communities, through information networking and the sharing of certain collectively acquired educational resources.

To ensure comprehensive coverage, the task force organized itself into eight sub-committees which studied the districts' principal fields of operations. These sub-committee findings were reviewed by the full task force, and form the main body of this report. Following is a summary of their individual recommendations.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This list follows the order in which recommendations appear in the eight sub-committee reports. Where similar recommendations are made by more than one sub-committee they are consolidated here,with a note to that effect. For more detailed wording and rationales please see later section on the individual sub-committee reports.

	Action to be taken by:	
#1	Ministry of Education and Small S.D.s	Minimum Administrative Staff Level That the Ministry of Education participate in a review of the minimum administrative staff level required for effective goverance operations of school boards in small school districts. (School Board Governance Operations: Sub-Committee #1)
#2	Ministry of Education and Small S.D.s	Training for Administrative Staff That the Ministry of Education assist the small schoool districts to develop a more comprehensive training program for small school district administrative staff. (School Board Governance Operations: Sub-Committee #1)
#3	Ministry of Education	Small School District Office Within Ministry of Education That the Ministry of Education help formalize the current information-sharing network among small school districts by establishing an office within the Ministry. The office could also help provide additional expertise and resources to the districts, and act as their advocate within the Ministry. (School Board Governance Operations: Sub-Committee # 1)
#4	Ministry of Education and Small S.D.s	Computer Networking Study That the Ministry of Education help assess computer networking projects in United States small school districts, with a view to implementing a pilot project for a system appropriate in British Columbia. (Communications Technology: Sub-Committee #2)

	Action to be taken by:	
#5	Small School Districts and Their Schools	Access to Envoy 100 That as an immediate or short run measure each small school district in B.C. and each school within those districts gains access to the Envoy 100 communications network system, and takes full advantage of the system training provided. (Communications Technology: Sub-Committee #2)
#6	Provincial Government	Provincial Electronic Network That a provincial, electronic network be established, essentially to disseminate education information and programs and also serve some administrative communication needs. (Communications Technology: Sub-Committee #2)
#7	Ministry of Education and Small S.D.s	Regional Educational Service Centres That the Ministry of Education help establish Regional Education Service Centres to be controlled by the small school districts served. (District Management:Sub-Committee #3)
#8	Small S.D. Boards	Funding to Attend Another School That school boards use the refundable provincial boarding allowance to assist senior students with unique program needs to attend another school. (District Management: Sub-Committee #3)
#9	Small S.D. Boards and Ministry of Education	Selling of Business Expertise That small school districts be encouraged to "sell" their business administration expertise to other public service or private enterprises in their area. (District Management: Sub-Committee #3)
#10	Ministry of Education & Small S.D. Boards	Assistance with Educational Communications That the provincial fiscal framework include funding, and that other resources be made available to small school districts, to help their educational programs benefit from advances in communications technology. (Education: Sub-Committee #4) (Finance: Sub-Committee #5)

	Action to be taken by:	
#11	Ministry of Education and Small S.D. Educators	Correspondence Education That educators in small school districts keep fully abreast of new "product" developments in the Correspondence Branch of the Ministry of Education. (Education: Sub-Committee #4)
#12	Small S.D. Boards & Staff	Learning Assessments That each school district analyse its relevant learning assessment results, attempt to establish the underlying factors affecting their students' performance, and take positive action where appropriate. (Education: Sub-Committee #4)
#13	Ministry of Education	Sharing of Learning Resources That the Ministry of Education appoint a co-ordinator of small school district learning resources, to help the districts more quickly meet individual needs in such fields as speech therapy, psychological assessment and curriculum implementation. (Education: Sub-Committee #4)
#14	Small S.D.s & Ministry of Education	New Curriculum and Courses That a series of initiatives be taken by small school districts and the Ministry of Education to help improve the process of curriculum implementation in the districts - examples in report. (Education: Sub-Committee #4)
#15	Ministry of Education	Instructional Support Funding That the provincial fiscal framework provide for the funding of at least one full-time instructional support professional, or equivalent, in every school district - estimated cost $220,000. (Finance: Sub-Committee #5)
#16	Ministry of Education	Funding for Small, Isolated, Secondary Schools That the fiscal framework provide for the funding of improved service levels for isolated, small secondary schools - estimated cost $2.5 million. (Finance: Sub-Committee #5)

	Action to be taken by:	
#17	Small S.D.s & other Local Govts.	Cost Saving Measures - Trades Personnel That small school districts undertake joint use agreements with other nearby local government bodies to share the services of qualified trades personnel. (Finance: Sub-Committee #5)
#18	Small S.D.s	Cost Saving Measures - Specialist Teachers That small school districts share with neighbouring districts in the services and costs of specialist teachers and other education professionals required to offer appropriate services to the students. (Finance: Sub-Committee #5)
#19	Small S.D.s & other Regional Orgs.	Cost Saving Measures - Guidance and Counselling That small school districts utilize specialized help from other regional organizations in providing guidance and counseiling services to students. (Finance: Sub-Committee #5)
#20	Small S.D.s	Cost Saving Measures - Business Expertise That small school districts share business administration expertise, computer facilities, etc. (Finance: Sub-Committee #5)
#21	Ministries of Education, Health & Social Services. Universities.	Special Services for Disadvantaged Students That regional teams provide special services for severely disadvantaged students in small school districts, and that there be an increase in travel funding for such students living in isolated areas. (Special Services: Sub-Committee #6)
#22	Universities. Ministries of Education, Health and Social Services.	Training Teachers to Meet Special Needs That greater attention be given to training and assisting classroom teachers in meeting students' special needs of a less severe nature, including multi-graded and multi-course assignments. (Special Services: Sub-Committee #6)

	Action to be taken by:	
#23	Small S.D.s & Ministry of Education	Work Experience and Career Preparation That non-teaching personnel be used by small school districts to help organize work experience and career preparation programs, and that the boarding out of isolated students for work experience programs be considered. (Special Services: Sub-Committee #6)
#24	Ministry of Education	Student Travel Funding That consideration be given to Provincial base funding for travel by small school district students living in isolated areas. (Special Services: Sub-Committee #6)
#25	Provincial Government & Post-Sec. Institutions	"Distance" Post-Secondary Education That the Province and its post-secondary institutions further increase their efforts to provide distance, post-secondary education in remote areas, and to "sell" its value to the public. (Special Services: Sub-Committee #6)
#26	Small S.D.s & Ministry of Education	Teacher Inservice Training and Retraining That additional funding be made available for travel and substitute teachers where teachers must "go-out" for inservice training, and for curriculum experts from the Ministry of Education to travel to small school districts to provide workshops, etc. (Personnel Management: Sub-Committee #7)
#27	Ministry of Education & Small S.D.s	Teacher Exchange and Mobility That there be increased recognition by the Ministry of Education, and by the small school districts, of all the educational improvements resulting from inter-district exchange of teachers and from other increases in teacher mobility. (Personnel Management: Sub-Committee #7)
#28	Ministry of Education and Small S.D.s	Non-Teachers as Education Resources That there be increased recognition for non-teachers helping to provide educational services in small school districts. (Personnel Management: Sub-Committee #7)

	Action to be taken by:	
#29	Small S.D.s	Contract Negotiations and "Crisis" Management That there be more formalized information sharing, and identification of personnel with expertise in negotiations and/or crisis management, to assist small school districts deal adequately with such issues. (Personnel Management: Sub-Committee #7
#30	Small S.D.s & Ministry of Education	District Administration and Staff Recruitment That additional funding be made available for the training/recruitment of district administrators familiar with small school district demands. (Personnel Management: Sub-Committee #7)
#31	Ministry of Education	Maintenance of Facilities - Financial Incentive That the Ministry of Education provide an incentive to save money on budget function #5 (operations and maintenance) and recognize the age and condition of facilities when establishing that function. (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)
#32	Ministry of Education	Maintenance of Facilities - Minor Repairs Funding That the Ministry of Education implement a minor repairs funding system which recognizes the age and condition of buildings, and the status of grounds development. (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)
#33	Small S.D.s	Maintenance of Facilities - Preventative Maintenance That small school districts dedicate more funding for preventative maintenance programs, and share their expertise and experience to help improve their conservation and maintenance programs. (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)
#34	Ministry of Education	Busing of Students - Funding That the Ministry of Education assist with funding the busing of students to extra-curricular events, and provide incentives for savings on budget function #7 (transportation). (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)

	Action to be taken by:	
#35	All S.D.s	Busing of Students - Safety Inspections That all school districts implement effective inspection programs for their vehicles. (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)
#36	Ministry of Education	District Resource Centres - Funding That the Ministry of Education acknowledge the significant educational contribution made by District Resource Centres (D.R.C.s) in small school districts, and provide funding dedicated to appropriate professional staffing of D.R.C.s and improved D.R.C. delivery systems to outlying schools. (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)
#37	Ministry of Education	District Resource Centres - P.E.M.C. Services. That the Ministry of Education expand the services of the Provincial Educational Media Centre, including the provision by P.E.M.C. of inservice training sessions for D.R.C.s' staff. (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)
#38	D.R.C. staff and Small S.D.s	District Resource Centres - Information Exchange That the D.R.C. staff of small school districts establish more formalized arrangements to exchange information and experiences. (Support Services: Sub-Committee #8)

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of how and why the study took place, the significance and timeliness of the report, and what it is hoped will ensue from its publication.

WHY SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS EXIST IN B.C. TODAY

Historical Background

As British Columbia became more settled in the early 1900s, more and more rural school districts were formed throughout the Province. In 1901 there were 257 school districts, and by 1931 the total was 830. Each covered a relatively small geographic area, centred on a substantially self-sufficient, local community. With improvements in communications and transportation, also the realization of some economies of scale in school operations, there was a steady reduction through amalgamations until in 1944 there were 650 school districts in British Columbia. In that year the recommendations of the Cameron Report (a provincial Royal Commission on Education) were implemented, and the 650 districts were reorganized into 74 in order to provide more effective and efficient education for their approximately 120,000 students.

Today there are 75 school districts in British Columbia, there having been relatively few significant district boundary changes and amalgamations since 1944. One of the criteria for these districts continues to be that they have sufficient students and resources to provide an effective and efficient education. The largest of these 75 districts has over 48,000 students, and three others have over 20,000; in total there are approximately 465,000 students. But included among the districts are a few that continue to be small in student numbers - see listing of the 17 "small" school districts. The smallest such district, Central Coast, had 440 students in September, 1986.

Effect of Geography

The principal reason why these "small" school districts continue to exist is geography. They almost invariably serve isolated, distinctive communities with their own educational needs and aspirations. A glance at a map identifying the 17 smallest districts shows that they occupy a disproportionately large area of the Province, usually in resource-rich regions that make substantial contributions to the British Columbia economy. These communities need and have a right to their own effective school districts.

Local automony is very important for B.C.'s small, isolated communities. It helps ensure that their distinct, educational needs are met, and brings a sense of stability and identity to the local region. Also there are beneficial economic effects for the community, as the school district is often one of its largest

employers as well as a major purchaser of goods and services.

Small School Districts are Efficient and Effective

Another reason for the continued existance of these small school districts is that accredited research demonstrates small school districts are exactly as efficient as larger ones - Peter Coleman, "Towards Equality of Educational Opportunity: Fiscal Equity and the Small School", Simon Fraser University, 1985. His study establishes that it is the high number of small schools in small school districts which creates any appearance of fiscal inefficiency. Most small schools, whether located in large or small school districts, are obliged to have funding diverted into extra staffing in order to achieve manageable teaching loads.

It is because of this diversion that small schools and small school districts have been able to maintain their educational effectiveness or "quality". Coleman rejects any causal connection between school district size and student achievement, a finding that is supported by the collective experience of those who work in the B.C. school system. Nevertheless, the diversion creates problems.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The Small School Problem

Small schools are more expensive to operate than large schools, because the greatest single school expenditure is teacher salaries and benefits. All school districts have to have higher staffing ratios in their small schools, to maintain adequate educational service levels and teaching workloads. The larger schools can enjoy economies of scale in their staffing.

Solely because of their geography small school districts in British Columbia, that is with approximately 1,200 students or less, have a greater proportion of small schools than have the larger districts. Student population density (the number of students living in the neighbourhood) is what largely determines the size of schools.

At the same time, all districts have similar fixed cost factors and operate under the same basic funding formula. The small school districts find that they must spend more to meet the practical staffing needs of their schools, and consequently have few discretionary funds left to meet students' special needs or to enrich educational programs in other ways. Generally, the students in small school districts do not receive the same level of educational services or opportunities as those in larger districts.

Effects on District Officials

The necessity of diverting funds to increase small school staffing also imposes heavy demands on the managers of small

school districts: the superintendents and secretary-treasurers. Resources to assist them are not available.

Superintendents who are obliged to function as sole educational manager have the heaviest burdens. They often carry out duties and fulfill responsibilities under conditions which would be unacceptable in larger districts. Unable to delegate work, they become immersed in a flood of tasks related only tenuously to the instruction of students. The excessive demands made upon their time and nervous energies hamper them in efforts to exercise educational leadership and initiative. In the larger districts these responsibilities are shared among the assistant superintendents, district specialists, etc.

The situation for secretary-treasurers in small districts is very similar. He or she is corporate officer, accountant, purchasing agent, school property manager, etc.

In consequence the morale of officials in small districts tends to be low. Superintendents and secretary-treasurers become enervated by their workloads and by the sense of alienation which assails managers who cannot deliver the quality of service required through no fault of their own. (See later sections on "District Management" and "Personnel Management" for some specific problems and proposed solutions).

Consequences for Teachers

The classroom teachers also experience frustrations because of the small districts' geographical isolation and limited staffing. Besides contributing to a sense of psychological dislocation, their remoteness from major population and cultural centres reduces opportunities for professional renewal and development. The geographical isolation inhibits the cross-pollination of ideas and experiences, and frequently curbs instructional change and innovation - essential for the teachers' educational growth.

Such conditions are believed partly responsible for the high turn-over of teachers in most small school districts, and the problems that in turn produces. (See later section on "Personnel Management").

Summation of Special Problems

The ultimate losers from the situations outlined above are, of course, the students, the local communities and society generally. The students frequently do not receive the same variety or depth of educational courses, services and experiences as students in larger districts. Some details of this deprivation appear in later sections of this report, particularly "Education", "Pupil Services" and "Supprt Services". The students' communities and society generally do not benefit from more highly educated future citizens.

It should be emphasized that the reason why small districts have a preponderence of small schools is not school board or Ministry of Education policy. Rather it is the geographic imperatives of distance and low student population density that prevent small districts benefiting from economies of scale, i.e. lower pupil-teacher ratios.

Larger districts are able to allocate funds from the "profits" realized by cost efficient large schools to such items as: disadvantaged or special needs students, gifted students, library services, cultural programs, sports and recreational programs, computer and other programs which require specialized technical equipment.

The fact that small school districts in British Columbia are so effective in practice is remarkable. The effectiveness is attributable in large part to the extra contributions expected of, and delivered by teachers, support staff and managers. It appears that they accept additional obligations and accede to local expectations as a tacit condition of employment. In the process it may well be that teachers in small districts forgo the militance which is common in some larger districts. But there is no reason to assume that teachers in small districts will continue to make these extra contributions which partly compensate for fewer educational resources being available. Moreover, there is no fairness in prolonging such conditions through failure or neglect to seek actively to change them.

It appears that the old adage applies to small school districts: there is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals. The question that must then be asked is what can be done to help resolve this inequality. The next part explains the role of this study in that process.

THE NEED FOR THE STUDY

Origins and Timeliness

A decision on action to help resolve the small school districts' problems was taken at a February, 1986, Small School Districts Conference sponsored by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. The key conference recommendation was for a task force to identify and study the special qualities and problems of small school districts in B.C., and to prepare recommendations for improvements. The Ministry of Education accepted and funded the proposal, and the present Task Force was formed consisting of four school district superintendents, three secretary-treasurers and two Ministry of Education officials - see listing in "Task Force Members" section. All have considerable, practical experience working in and with British Columbia small school districts.

As described earlier, this report consolidates and summarizes the findings of the Task Force's eight sub-committees. The publication of the report is believed particulary timely because of renewed interest by the Provincial Government in the efficiency and effectiveness of local government systems, and because of the Royal Commission on Education currently underway in British Columbia. To quote from Premier Vander Zalm (Hansard, March 18, 1987, p.176):

> We are committed as a government to decentralize. The goal of government is to try and provide more opportunities for decisions to be made at the local level, to give recognition to the fact that oftentimes many of the decisions we've been faced with here in the past could better be decided upon in the community through the government of that community, be it a municipal council or a regional board or a school board, to provide more of those opportunities at the local level.

Also, from a March 19, 1987, news release of the Minister of Finance, Mel Couvelier, which accompanied the Provincial Budget:

> Shifting responsibility to local governments is desirable, because it moves the provision of services closer to the people and because smaller governments tend to be more efficient and cost-conscious than larger ones.

Clearly, changes instituted to help small school districts increase their efficiency and effectiveness would conform with this broad provincial policy on local governance.

Educational Significance

It is believed the Task Force Report will prove extremely helpful to the Royal Commission on Education (Barry Sullivan, Q.C.) which is currently traversing the Province receiving input from all sectors of society. The Commission has broad terms of reference including a specific responsibility to make recommendations on "quality enhancement", and on "means of ensuring that geography, gender and other extraneous considerations do not pose unreasonable or inequitable burdens or barriers for B.C. students in their personal educational development." The Task Force believes that the "smallness problems" it has identified fit within that latter description.

In addition to the special circumstance described above, a report of this nature is always timely. Information on the distinctive nature, strengths and weaknesses, of the Province's small school districts is as necessary to a fundamental understanding of its education system as is similar information on British Columbia's large, metropolitan school districts. The report should, it is believed, prove invaluable to the Ministry of Education when carrying out its continuing, province-wide, administrative

decision-making responsibilities.

Further Developments

Besides direct action on its specific recommendations, the Task Force believes that the report should stimulate the continued collection of information, further studies and a maintained overall interest in small school districts on the part of the Ministry and, to a more limited extent perhaps, organizations such as the B.C. Teachers' Federation, the College of Teachers and the B.C. School Trustees Association.

Just as important, however, the Task Force intends that its study and report should help create a continuing sense of purpose and identity among small school districts. They clearly need to work together more, to share information, experiences and facilities, as well as to assert their common voice as unique, significant contributors to the Province's educational and social structures.

THE SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN B.C.

The Task Force recognizes the difficulties in defining what is a small school district. What constitutes a "small" district appears to depend on geographic characteristics as much as on number of students. Nevertheless, when identifying the small school districts in British Columbia for this study, the Task Force had to rely on some statistical measure. It chose student population of approximately 1,200 or less.

Following is a list of the 17 districts identified by the Task Force.

The Small School Districts in B.C.

	Student Enrolment, September 1986.
S.D. #4 (Windermere)	1,140
S.D. #10 (Arrow Lakes)	889
S.D. #12 (Grand Forks)	1,210
S.D. #13 (Kettle Valley)	598
S.D. #16 (Keremeos)	605
S.D. #17 (Princeton)	882
S.D. #26 (North Thompson)	1,110
S.D. #29 (Lillooett)	1,050
S.D. #49 (Central Coast)	440
S.D. #50 (Queen Charlotte Islands)	1,170
S.D. #64 (Gulf Islands)	1,228
S.D. #66 (Lake Cowichan)	1,031
S.D. #76 (Agassiz-Harrison)	773
S.D. #81 (Fort Nelson)	1,056
S.D. #84 (Vancouver Island West)	983
S.D. #87 (Stikine)	496
S.D. #92 (Nisgha)	526

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Dr. G. Roth, Superintendent, S.D. #66 (Lake Cowichan).
- chairman from April 22, 1987.

Mr. L. Archer, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #12 (Grand Forks).

Mr. R. Chambers, Superintendent, S.D. #10 (Arrow Lakes).

Mr. T. Keefe, Superintendent, S.D. #13 (Kettle Valley).

Mr. R. Logan, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #29 (Lillooett).

Mr. J. Martin, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #84 (Vancouver Island West).

Mr. T. Miller, Ministry of Education - from July 20, 1987.

Mr. R. Samborski, Superintendent, S.D. #49, (Central Coast).

Mr. D. Smythe, Ministry of Education - from July 20, 1987.

Thanks are also due to the following who served on the committee during various periods:

Mr. D. Therrien, Superintendent, S.D. #42 (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows).
- chairman until April 22, 1987.

Mr. T. Good, Ministry of Education - until July 20, 1987.

Mr. R. Watson, Ministry of Education - until July 20, 1987.

Report writer: Mr. A. Nicholls.

SUMMARY REPORTS OF OPERATIONS SUB-COMMITTEES

The Task Force decided to form eight sub-committees to study the small school districts' major operational areas:

1. School Board Governance
2. Communications Technology
3. District Management
4. Education
5. Finance
6. Special Services
7. Personnel Management
8. Support Services.

After reviews of the sub-committees' findings by the Task Force, the following summary reports were prepared.

Readers who wish to examine a recommendation or finding in greater detail should contact the relevant sub-committee chairman. Each sub-committee's membership is listed at the end of its summary report.

Operations Area #1: SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE OPERATIONS.

One of the most critical factors in small school district performance is how effectively the school board itself can operate. Elected school boards are the democratic keystones of their districts. They set policies and budgets, determine staffing, establish local programs, etc., leaving staff to administer the day-to-day activities of the district in accordance with board policies. To carry out their governance responsibilities effectively the boards must have adequate, well-trained staff to link each board and its district.

The question of staffing the interface between school boards and the day-to-day activities within small districts, was examined by the task force. It has three recommendations to help ensure that the school boards' governance operations are as effective as possible. They concern staffing levels, training and the availability of consultative assistance.

Minimum Administrative Staff Levels

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education participate in a review of the minimum administrative staff level required for effective governance operations of school boards in small school districts.

Rationale: Typically, the number of staff available to provide efficient linkage between the school board and the day-to-day activities of the small school district is limited. Some districts do not have full-time Superintendents or Secretary-Treasurers.

Where there are insufficient staff to help co-ordinate and to assist school boards in their operations and to ensure that the boards' requirements are implemented, there appears an inevitable tendency towards the reactive or "crisis" management style of school district governance. Such districts seldom have the time to plan, to implement systems, or to research adequately the background information needed for effective board decision making.

Training for Administrative Staff

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education assist the small school districts to develop a more comprehensive training program for small school district administrative staff.

Rationale: Another problem facing the small school districts is the limited experience of some of their administrative

staff, and of those who might be available to augment them. Also, small school districts can find themselves functioning as a training ground for district administrators, with inevitable disruptions and costs.

School board governance operations are hampered with inexperienced administrative staff, and by a high staff turn-over. Coupled with a typically high ratio of inexperienced teachers, the districts find it difficult to fulfill their mandate.

The Ministry of Education could either directly, or through designated funding of an agency such as the B.C. School Trustees Association, assist with in-service training in such topics as school board roles and functions, the significance of board policies, board-administrator interactions, etc. Assistance could also be provided to the small school districts in the location and training of suitable candidates for unfilled administrative positions.

Small S.D. Office Within Ministry of Education

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education help formalize the current information-sharing network among small school districts by establishing an office within the Ministry. The office could also help provide additional expertise and resources to the districts, and act as their advocate within the Ministry.

Rationale: In view of current restraints on number and experience of small school district administrative staff, boards experience difficulties in obtaining mature advice and opinions on problems. Often, there appears to be a complete lack of a particular type of expertise among school district administrators. In consequence, school board governance operations, and district activities generally, suffer.

An office within the Ministry of Education, dedicated to the exchange and provision of information and advice to small school districts, helping them secure needed resources, and ensuring that their viewpoint and needs are taken into consideration during Ministry decision making, would be of great benefit to the districts' operations.

School Board Governance Operations Sub-Committee Members

Dr. G. Roth, Superintendent, S.D. #66 (Lake Cowichan), chairman.
Mr. R. Logan, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #29 (Lillooett).

Operations Area #2: COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

The task force studied the communications potential of electronic technology for two major areas of small school districts' operations : the education process and administration. The objective was not to recommend what educational or administrative material should be disseminated but <u>how</u> such information should be transmitted.

The major, current problem for B.C. small school districts is to balance cost and timeliness when sending and receiving information - to ensure up-to-the-minute information for those needing it requires money and effort. Compounding the problem is the small school districts' lack of experienced, technical personnel.

The task force concluded that an electronic information system for small school districts is technically feasible, and would justify its cost through enhanced delivery of educational services and improved administration. It recommends:

> a more detailed study of computer networking projects in small United States school districts
>
> increased use of Envoy network by B.C. small school districts, assisted by a skilled co-ordinator
>
> improved dissemination of educational information and programs through a provincial, electronic network.

The task force also noted that taking full advantage of advances in communications technology must not jeopardise "grass roots" communications with parents and the public - the bases of good public relations for individual schools and the school district.

<u>Computer Networking Study</u>

<u>Recommendation</u>: That the Ministry of Education help assess computer networking projects in United States small school districts, with a view to implementing a pilot project for a system appropriate in British Columbia.

<u>Rationale</u>: A number of networking systems have been tested and implemented in United States school jurisdictions, such as in West Virginia and Houston, Texas. The task force has studied information concerning them, and there is no doubt that British Columbia lags far behind in development and implementation of such systems. The task force believes that our small school

districts would benefit from a proven system, and that the quickest and cheapest route to that goal is the study and implementation course recommended.

Access to Envoy 100

Recommendation: That as a more immediate, or short run, measure each small school district in B.C. and each school within those districts gains access to the Envoy 100 communications network system, and takes full advantage of the system training provided.

Rationale: Schools and their district offices need to communicate constantly if education is to be provided effectively and efficiently - for example: timesheets, work orders, purchase orders, information requests, intra-district memos, newsletters. In addition, there is much essential information coming into the district from the Ministry of Education, the B.C. School Trustees Association, etc. The task force believes that the Envoy 100 system (electronic mail) best meets these needs, pending implementation of the previous recommendation. Systems training could be supplied by B.C. Telephone, and user groups formed. To get maximum benefit an experienced co-ordinator should assist in developing the organizational model.

Provincial Electronic Network

Recommendation: That a provincial, electronic network be established, essentially to disseminate education information and programs and also serve some administrative communication needs.

Rationale: Currently, the Provincial Educational Media Centre (PEMC) in co-operation with the Curriculum Development Branch and the Correspondence Branch of the Ministry of Education, develops and locates material to provide or supplement desired courses. PEMC also produces and supplies quality programming and expertise in technological training, probably affordable by a co-operative of small school districts.

The Knowledge Network (KN), while mainly concerned with college level students, is beginning to service the school system. KN's audio-conferencing links classrooms across the province and the country, via telephone at a relatively modest cost. It is anticipated that the planned new Open Learning

Authority will co-ordinate and direct KN's future work.

Various other systems are developing, for example, the Schools Initiative Project, a conferencing system from A.T and T. Canada Ltd. and the Electronic University Network from the U.S. Integrated computer and video disc players are now available but in a developing market the cost of necessary hardware may be high. The task force finds relatively little appropriate educational software available at present.

The task force believes that PEMC and Knowledge Network are the current leaders in the production, acquisition and delivery of educational materials that may be electronically transmitted to B.C. schools. The Province should support them wholeheartedly, possibly through the anticipated , new Open Learning Authority, in quickly implementing a provincial network that will, among others, serve the needs of B.C.'s small school districts.

Communications Technology Sub-Committee Membership

Mr. L. Archer, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #12 (Grand Forks), chairman.
Mr. S. Barnett, Asst. Sec.-Treasurer, S.D. #69 (Qualicum).
Ms. S. Chambers, District Resource Centre Librarian, S.D. #10 (Arrow Lakes)
Mr. G. Johnson, Asst. Superintendent, S.D. #89 (Shuswap).
Mr. W. Martin, Asst. Sec.-Treasurer, S.D. #7 (Nelson).
Mr. D. Sturko, Ministry of Education.

Operations Area #3: DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

Ensuring that small school districts have the qualified, experienced and specialized management resources required for excellence presents a serious challenge. There are recognizable limits on staffing that must be countered by appropriate, innovative measures. The task force has studied school jurisdictions throughout North America, and developed three major recommendations:

* **Provision of Regional Education Service Centres.**
* **Students with unique needs be boarded in larger districts.**
* **Small school districts sell their management expertise to other public service or private organisations.**

Following are the rationales for these recommendations.

Regional Educational Service Centres

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education help establish Regional Education Service Centres to be controlled by the small school districts served.

Rationale: Throughout Canada the study found that the single most pressing problem next to tight finances is the provision of specialized services. The smaller United States jurisdictions appear to be very generously staffed in comparison to their Canadian counterparts who can not expect to "own" that level of staffing.

Of first importance is special education - particularly speech pathologists and educational psychologists - and secondly the subject specialists. Some jurisdictions have recognized the need in the field and have devised a delivery system, while others have ignored the problem to the detriment and frustration of the system and students.

The three provincial patterns recommended are those in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario.

Sakatchewan divides the province into six shared service regions, and provides the funding to districts which pool their entitlements in order to staff a shared services facility. Although the Ministry pays for all expenses associated with the services facilities, control of them lies with the participating districts.

Some parallels in British Columbia are, for example, the Regional Education Centres in Abbotsford and

Kamloops which are fully funded by the Ministry and completely under local control. The committee recommends this arrangement as a model.

Manitoba has established five Regional Centres which provide specialist services to small rural districts. Districts are not obliged to participate and may receive a grant in lieu. The Ministry of Education retains ownership of the Centres and hires the personnel but applies little supervision to the Centres which operate on trust. The participating districts effectively control and direct operations.

Ontario's Ministry of Education has established six Regional Offices, three in the north of the province and three in the south. Typically these Regional Offices are staffed with 12 managers and support-staff. Their main responsibilities are: administrative activities; review activities; and service activities. The service activities in the north include those this task force is recommending, in addition to curriculum development/implementation, French language consultation/supervision and English language consultation/supervision. The Regional office also supplies administrative/supervisory services to districts which have no educational officers above principal.

For British Columbia it is recommended that an immediate examination be made of the optimum number and locations for such regional service centres, to serve at minimum the seventeen small school districts identified earlier in this report.

Funding to Attend Another School

Recommendation: That School boards use the refundable provincial boarding allowance to assist senior students with unique program needs to attend another school.

Rationale: Most North American jurisdictions recognize that it is difficult for small secondary schools to offer highly diversified programs. Some senior students with unique program requirements may need financial assistance to attend schools which can meet their requirements.

In British Columbia, the Provincial Educational Media Centre can sometimes help. But where not, financial assistance is important if certain students' unique needs are to be met.

Selling of Business Expertise

Recommendation: That small school districts be encouraged to "sell" their business administration expertise to other public service or private enterprises in their area.

Rationale: In the United States a developing phenomenon is the co-operative School District, a service association without territory or students serving participating school districts. It is similar to the Saskatchewan shared service facilities (see rationale to recommendation #1 above), plus a purchasing function. The co-operative School District limits its activities to schools, but the task force believes there may be financial advantage to bulk purchasing supplies with, for example, the local municipality or hospital.

The only co-operative Canadian business administration activity is in New Brunswick where three urban districts pool payroll, accounts receivable/payable, etc. The task force believes school district offices and their computer expertise could sell such services to municipalities and hospitals.

District Management Sub-Committee Members

Mr. T. Good, Ministry of Education, chairman.
Mr. W. Jory, Superintendent, S.D. #26 (North Thompson).
Mr. T. Miller, Ministry of Education.

Operations Area #4: EDUCATION

The Task Force identified several areas of concern for small school districts, relating directly to the provision of educational programs:

how to get maximum benefit from advances in communications technology;
what should be the future role of correspondence education;
to what extent can improvements stem from analysing learning assessment results;
what arrangements to make for the sharing of learning resources; and
how best to develop and implement new curriculum and courses.

Numerous proposals emerged - see detailed report of Education Sub-Committee, with support documents. Following are the major recommendations with basic rationales.

Assistance With Educational Communications

Recommendation: That additional funding and other resources be made available to small school districts, to help their educational programs benefit from advances in communications technology.

Rationale: For small school districts to use technological developments to full advantage in their provision of educational programs requires additional funding for staffing, training, program development and the purchase of equipment. Similarly, there is a need for a team of Ministry of Education specialists to provide technical expertise and problem solving skills in needs assessments, program planning and implementation.

Correspondence Education

Recommendation: That educators in small school districts keep fully abreast of new "product" developments in the Correspondence Branch of the Ministry of Education.

Rationale: Small school districts rely heavily on the Correspondence Branch's traditional services to help provide quality educational programs. New developments are taking place within the Branch, such as multiprogramming class correspondence projects, and small school district educators need to understand them and their potential if they are to be incorporated effectively into their districts'

programs. One suggestion is an in-service tape on specific courses such as science and technology, and physics.

Learning Assessments

Recommendation: That each small school district should analyse its relevant learning assessment results, attempt to establish the underlying factors affecting their students' performance, and take positive action where appropriate.

Rationale: Valuable information concerning the effectiveness of specific educational programs is contained in the learning assessment results provided by the Ministry of Education. While recognizing that there are many variables and underlying factors that may influence the results, careful analysis by a district can assist it to achieve optimum proficiency in its educational programs.

The primary responsibility for such analysis and action rests with the individual district, but the Student Assessment Branch of the Ministry of Education can assist with advice, interpretation guidelines, etc.

Sharing of Learning Resources

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education appoint a co-ordinator of small school district learning resources, to help the districts more quickly meet individual needs in such fields as speech therapy, psychological assessment and curriculum implementation.

Rationale: Small school districts cannot afford to hire full-time specialists as learning resources. Where contiguous with a larger district, a small district is often able to share in the use and cost of its learning resources on an "as and when needed" basis. More isolated small districts could secure and share in the total cost of their own resources, provided that the organizing potential was in place. This would save considerable time presently spent by small school districts in locating needed learning resources which could be more efficiently accessed through a co-ordinator.

New Curriculum and Courses

Recommendation: That a series of initiatives be taken by small school districts and the Ministry of Education to help improve the process of curriculum implementation in the districts.

Rationale: Curriculum implementation in small school districts suffers from their general shortage of person-power and expertise. While there are some advantages accruing from smallness - less bureaucracy, easier dissemination of information, generally a young staff with high degrees of energy and involvement, etc. - the overall limits on staff numbers, and the inexperience of staff and their lack of resource "contacts," usually limit the range of courses that can be introduced.

To make up for these difficulties it is proposed that a series of initiatives be promoted on a continuing basis, such as:

district course outlines be developed to help orient beginning teachers;
arrangements be made for experienced teachers to visit beginners (possibly a mentor program that helps older teachers phase into retirement);
the Ministry of Education conduct orientation visits to the isolated districts and schools;
a hotline be developed to allow beginning teachers to contact experienced educators at a resource centre; and
distance education services to expand existing orientation programs for teachers.

Education Sub-Committee Members

Mr. R. Samborski, Superintendent, S.D. #49 (Central Coast), chairman.
Mr. T. Miller, Ministry of Education.
Mr. B. Naylor, Ministry of Education.
Mr. A. Frisk, Ministry of Education.
Dr. B. Francombe, Ministry of Education.
Mr. R. Chambers, Superintendent, S.D. #10 (Arrow Lakes).
Mr. K. Van Apeldoorn, Provincial Education Media Centre.

Operations Area #5: FINANCE

The task force addressed two issues relevant to the financing of small school districts:

adjustments to the current, provincial fiscal framework which determines the level of basic funding for school districts;

cost saving measures that might be applied by the small school districts to their operations.

Many small school district administrators have indicated general dissatisfaction with the level of funding established by the fiscal framework in recent years. In the 1986-7 and 1987-8 fiscal years the Province has, in consultation with the districts, made gradual improvements to the fiscal framework's service levels and cost factors. Furthermore, school boards have been permitted to budget for supplementary operating amounts with costs being paid by residential taxation. (It is important to note, however, that most small school districts have limited residential tax bases). The committee has three recommendations for adjustments to the fiscal framework that have minimal cost implications, yet will resolve widely held concerns about unrealistic levels of funding in certain areas.

School districts in British Columbia have searched during the recent restraint years to find ways to operate more efficiently and economically. The task force recommends several strategies that it believes are particularly relevant to small school district operations.

Instructional Support Funding

Recommendation: That the fiscal framework provide for the funding of at least one full-time instructional support professional, or equivalent, in every school district. (Estimated cost of $220,000.).

Rationale: For the proper management and support of instruction, greater provision should be made in the fiscal framework for professional personnel to undertake duties related to specific levels or areas of instruction. In addition to the demands noted above, most superintendents have responsibilities for professional development of both teachers and administrators, the development and implementation of curriculum, special education, supervision and evaluation of instruction and salary negotiations. Many superintendents in small districts have stated that they do not have the time that must be devoted to these responsibilities. In larger districts it is common to find most of the instructional support

provided by supervisors or co-ordinators of instruction.

The funding of at least one full-time instructional support professional will not only allow the superintendent to devote more time to other duties and responsibilities, but will also enhance the quality of instruction in the classroom.

Funding for Small, Isolated Secondary Schools

Recommendation: That the fiscal framework provide for the funding of improved service levels for isolated, small secondary schools. (Estimated cost of $2.5 million).

Rationale: Under the existing funding arrangements small, isolated, secondary schools cannot offer the programs offered by larger schools. In his paper, "The Small School District in British Columbia: The Myths and the Reality", Dr. Peter Coleman of the Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, notes the strong and stable statistical relationship between school size and the pupil/teacher ratio. Coleman notes both the higher cost of operating small schools because of the much lower pupil/teacher ratios required and the disproportionate occurence of small schools in small districts.

A revised service level would provide relief to districts with small secondary schools. The service level advocated here for isolated, secondary schools is that recommended by the provincial Fiscal Framework Review Committee: the 1987/1988 service level amended so that the number of teacher units supported for each of the listed grades for which the school has reported enrolment is increased

	Recommendation	Actual 1987/88
Grade 8	0.50 teacher units	0.50 teacher units
Grade 9	0.75 teacher units	0.50 teacher units
Grade 10	1.00 teacher units	0.75 teacher units
Grade 11	1.50 teacher units	1.00 teacher units
Grade 12	2.00 teacher units	1.50 teacher units

Assistance With Educational Communications

Recommendation: That the fiscal framework provide for the funding of the costs associated with the implementation of new technology into the school system.

Rationale: The utilization of microcomputers, advance telecommunications and broadcasting technologies has already had a profound effect on the classroom, the administration of schools and adminstration at the district level. It is essential that the benefits of the available technology be utilised in every small district.

As most small school districts do not have the high residential assessed values per student that tend to moderate tax rates, it has not been possible for those districts to purchase new equipment through non-shareable capital budgets. The Fund for Excellence grants, which tended to relate closely to district size, enabled some progress to be made in the implementation of new technology. New technology as it relates to education in B.C. can be, for example, computer labs with teacher stations and microcomputers, interactive instructional packages, satellite dishes and communications networks.

Small school districts can put new technology to work in the classroom, to improve instruction, to improve program offerings and, once the initial investment has been made, to do so with significant cost reductions. The Task Force's conclusions support and endorse the more detailed study and recommendations of the Provincial Advisory Committee on Computers, in particular those parts of the Committee's report relating to the application of computers in the schools, and to teacher in-service training.

Cost Saving Measures - Trades Personnel

Recommendation: That small school districts in British Columbia undertake joint use agreements with other nearby local government bodies to share the services of qualified trades personnel.

Rationale: The small school districts and other local government bodies have needs for skilled trades, but cannot afford to hire them on a full-time basis. Sharing of their services and salaries would resolve this problem, in a similar manner to the agreements that have been negotiated for joint use and cost sharing of certain equipment and facilities.

Cost Saving Measures - Specialist Teachers

Recommendation: That small school districts share with neighbouring districts in the services and costs of specialist teachers and other education professionals required to offer appropriate services to students.

Rationale: Many school districts, medium as well as small in size, cannot afford to employ needed educational specialists full-time. This problem can be ameliorated through co-operation between neighbouring districts. Staff employed by larger districts may be released part-time to smaller districts at cost plus travel expenses, to provide educational support in such areas as psychological testing and speech assessments.

Such arrangements are cost effective and beneficial to students, without reducing local control of school districts. Similar cost and education advantages can accrue when small school districts share in professional development activities of larger, neighbouring districts.

Cost Saving Measures - Guidance and Counselling

Recommendation: That small school districts utilize specialized help from other regional organizations in providing guidance and counselling.

Rationale: Teachers who specialize on student counselling are in short supply in small school districts. The districts could mount joint efforts with municipal, volunteer and public agencies to enhance the schools' base of specialist counselling help that can be available when needed.

Cost Saving Measures - Business Expertise

Recommendation: That small school districts share business administration expertise, computer facilities, etc.

Rationale: The districts could operate some form of service association, to pool their requirements for payroll, accounts receivable and payable, etc. - see sub-committee report #3: District Management, for details.

Finance Sub-Committee Members

Mr. J. Martin, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #84 (Vancouver Island West) - chairman.
Mr. A. Fletcher, Superintendent of Schools, S.D. #29 (Lilloett).
Mr. M. Ruehlen, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #72 (Campbell River).
Mr. R. Gage, Schools Research Officer, Ministry of Education.
Dr. I. Kelsey, Principal, Captain Meares Elementary-Secondary School, Tahsis.

Operations Area #6: SPECIAL SERVICES

In addition to basic educational services, some students in the B.C. school system receive special services such as those for children with learning handicaps. Many special educational services are accepted by the Ministry of Education as cost shareable in a school board's operating budget. For example:

learning assistance, including programs for the gifted;
sight or hearing impaired programs;
programs for students with learning difficulties;
programs for Native Indian students and recent immigrants.

The task force identified several "problem" special services for small school districts, and has a series of recommendations concerning them - see below. In most instances the recommendations are for more information sharing, integration of services, etc. rather than solely for more money.

Special Services for Disadvantaged Students

Recommendation: That regional teams provide special services for severely disadvantaged students in small school districts, and that there be an increase in travel funding for such students living in isolated areas of the districts.

Rationale: Special services for severely disadvantaged students are expensive and, as funding for them is provided to all school districts on the same basis, small school districts often have difficulties in supplying such services. The concept of regional teams (Ministries of Education, Health, Social Services - small school districts - universities) which would contract with the districts to supply special services, should be explored further. Establishing stronger links between the relevant ministries at the regional as well as provincial levels also holds promise.

Some special services can only be provided at central facilities - for deaf students and others requiring highly specialized medical and educational services, for example. There needs to be an increase in travel funding for students who need these special services but live in isolated areas of the districts.

Training Teachers to Meet Special Needs

Recommendation: That greater attention be given to training and assisting classroom teachers in meeting students' special needs that are of a less severe nature, including multi-graded and multi-course assignments.

Rationale: Small school districts find it difficult to meet the less severe needs for special services required by approximately 3.5% of the student population. Limited staffing, and geographic dispersal of student population, are the underlying causes. Instead of attempting to segregate such students in special classes, the classroom teacher could with extra help and training serve many of their needs. More "learning specialists" (i.e. special education generalist teachers) would be required to assist classroom teachers, also increased sharing of such resources through the establishment of joint local problem-solving teams. The teams could include personnel from the provincial ministries and the local school districts.

Classroom teachers could be seconded to gain direct experience in special needs problem areas, and university teacher preparation programs could give more attention to them.

Work Experience and Career Preparation

Recommendation: That non-teaching personnel be used by small school districts to help organize work experience and career preparation programs, and that the boarding out of isolated students for work experience programs be considered.

Rationale: Small school districts do not have the staff time nor expertise to organize work experience and career preparation programs. The problem is intensified where there is an absence of local work experience possibilities, as often occurs in isolated areas.

These districts should consider contracting out this function to relevantly experienced non-teachers, possibly on regional sharing bases. Where local work experience openings are not available, extra funding could help students to board out in another community that has such opportunities.

Student Travel Funding

Recommendation: That consideration be given to Provincial base funding for travel by small school district students living in isolated areas of the Province.

Rationale: Student travel for curricular and extra-curricular

purposes does not currently receive provincial funding. Some small school districts have been able to provide limited grants, subsidized use of school buses etc., with the balance coming from school fund raising activities and parent and community donations.

Travel costs and attendance fees continue to escalate, while parent and community resources in many locations are unable to keep pace. The school district's local residential tax base is often limited. The contribution that student travel makes to education programs in isolated areas of the Province could perhaps be considered by the current Royal Commission on Education, specifically to assess whether some base funding by the Province is warranted.

"Distance" Post-Secondary Education

Recommendation: That the Province and its post-secondary institutions further increase their efforts to provide distance, post-secondary education in remote areas, and to "sell" its value to the public.

Rationale: Post-secondary education participation is commonly believed lower in isolated areas of the Province, to the disadvantage of the individuals and communities alike. Two factors appear to be involved: availability, and family/community attitudes towards further education.

Community colleges, the Open Learning Institute, university "distance" initiatives, etc., have helped make post-secondary education more readily available throughout the Province at practical costs. But there are still isolated areas where the full benefits of these developments are not yet available.

In addition to improved availability, there needs to be more favourable family and community attitudes towards further education, to help create the needed, internal yearning on the part of school students. A Province-wide campaign to "sell" the value of post-secondary education, in terms of lower unemployment, higher earnings and a more fulfilling life, is needed.

Special Services Sub-Committee Membership

Mr. R. Watson, B.C. Ministry of Education.

Operations Area #7: PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Following a survey of small school districts in B.C. the task force has major recommendations relating to the following personnel management issues:

teacher inservice training and retraining
teacher exchange and overall mobility
non-professionals as education resources
contract negotiations and crisis management
district administration and staff recruitment.

The recommendations have two principal themes - increased opportunities to share individual expertise throughout the small school districts, and funding recognition for that sharing and similar initiatives required to combat "smallness problems" in personnel management.

Teacher Inservice Training and Retraining

Recommendations: That additional funding be made available for travel and substitute teachers where teachers must "go-out" for inservice training, and for curriculum experts from the Ministry of Education to travel to small school districts to provide workshops, etc.

Rationales: Reduced budgets and declining enrolments in recent years have accentuated the problems of small school districts trying to:

maintain the vitality and update the knowledge of an ageing teaching force;
ensure the competency of reassigned teachers.

Small staffs require teachers to travel outside the district for inservice training, with extensive substitute teaching resulting. Additional funding for travel expenses and to provide for long-term substitutes or "super-numeraries" is needed.

The lack of curriculum and technological expertise in small school districts, and financial restraints on extensive teacher travel, make it desirable that the Ministry of Education bring the expertise and updated knowledge to the districts. It should be noted that in really remote districts the cost of travel to zone conferences may be as expensive as travel to Vancouver.

Teacher Exchange and Mobility

Recommendation: That there be increased recognition by the Ministry of Education, and by the small school districts, of all the educational improvements resulting from inter-district exchange of teachers and from other increases in teacher mobility. Moreover, that this increased recognition be reflected in administrative policies and procedures.

Rationale: Small school districts with few schools cannot effectively increase their teachers' mobility by transfers within the district. The problem applies particularly to teachers in secondary schools, institutions where fresh ideas , energy and enthusiasm can be highly beneficial. One answer here appears to be increased inter-district transfers.

An exchange network that might include larger districts, could be developed. Funding for this and for defraying teachers' relocation expenses would need to be provided. The teachers' professional organization could take some responsibility and help provide leadership and encouragement.

The seniority factor for staff reduction would need to be de-emphasized, if teachers are to be successfully encouraged to move from one school district to another. Portability of sick leave credits would also help.

Student-teachers and teacher-interns should be steered where practicable to small school districts, to provide new ideas and vigour that enables "locked-in" staff to experience fresh methods and procedures.

Non-Teachers As Education Resources

Recommendation: That there be increased recognition for non-teachers helping to provide educational services in small school districts.

Rationale: Because of limited staffs of full-time certified teachers, small school districts are more reliant on para-professionals and teacher aides to help provide a broad range of educational services. In small communities there are often people available with specialized practical skills and knowledge, as well as retired teachers, who are eager to assist in the classroom.

Additional funding is required to make optimum use of para-professionals, including their participation in professional in-service activities. In particular, special needs aides should be funded through Fiscal Framework Function 3 (special programs), to help eliminate co-ordination and hiring difficulties currently being experienced with the Ministry of Social Services.

Contract Negotiations and "Crisis" Management

Recommendation: That there be more formalized information sharing, and identification of personnel with expertise in negotiations and/or crisis management, to assist small school districts deal adequately with such issues.

Rationale: Although contract negotiations and crisis management are believed best dealt with at the local level, the small school districts usually lack experienced personnel to do this. Consequently, the development of negotiation strategy and proper management planning frequently suffers.

More formalised information sharing would assist each small school district know what items are being negotiated elsewhere and what are the possible responses. Personnel who have a record of successful negotiations and/or crisis resolutions should be identified, and made available for consultations and, at times, on-the-spot negotiations. A detailed inventory of such resource people in neighbouring small school districts could be the basis for appeals for assistance. Regional "offices" could provide support for local management during crises and peaks.

District Administration and Staff Recruitment

Recommendation: That additional funding be made available for the training/recruitment of district administrators familiar with small school district demands.

Rationale: Potential small district administrators should be made aware of district needs and expectations, curricular and extra-curricular.

Student teachers could be placed in small school districts, with additional supervision made possible through extra funding, to help provide a pool of candidates specifically trained in small school districts needs and demands.

Personnel Sub-Committee Membership

Mr. T. Keefe, Superintendent, S.D. #13 (Kettle Valley), chairman.
Mr. M. Roscoe, Superintendent, S.D. #16 (Keremeos).
Mr. M. Linley, Superintendent, S.D. #12 (Grand Forks).

Operations Area #8: SUPPORT SERVICES

"Support services" includes three basic school district functions:

maintenance of buildings, plant and grounds
provision of student transportation (busing)
operation of district resource centres (libraries).

The task force surveyed the 17 small school districts in B.C. to identify problem areas in the three functions peculiar to those districts, and also to determine recommendations for solutions.

The recommendations centre on increased funding and financial incentives for preventative maintenance programs, more resources for the Ministry's Provincial Educational Media Centre (P.E.M.C.) which produces films, videos and other valuable resource materials, and greater acceptance by the small school districts of effective techniques that help reduce their "support service" problems.

Maintenance of Facilities - Financial Incentive

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education provide an incentive to save money on budget function #5 (operations and maintenance) and recognize the age and condition of facilities when establishing that function.

Rationale: A typical small district in B.C. has 13,200 square metres of building floor space. On average there is one maintenance person for every 6,100 square metres, one custodian (janitor) for every 2,000 square metres, plus one maintenance superintendent in each district. Heat and light costs $10.00 a year per square metre on average, and physical repairs and maintenance $34.00 a year per square metre. These costs are higher than for larger districts which can practice economies of scale.

Overall there appears to be a lack of effective maintenance programs, principally due to underfunding and the absence of financial incentives to save money on Ministry of Education budgetary function #5 (operations and maintenance).

Maintenance of Facilities - Minor Repairs Funding

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education implement a minor repairs funding system which recognizes the age and condition of buildings, and the status of grounds development.

Rationale: The need for minor repairs increases with the age of facilities and to a certain extent with the climate. In order to provide an ongoing repairs program that saves money in the long run, these factors should be taken into account in the provision of funding.

Maintenance of Facilities - Preventative Maintenance

Recommendation: That small school districts dedicate more funding for preventative maintenance programs, and share their expertise and experiences to help improve their conservation and maintenance programs.

Rationale: The small school districts themselves could help resolve their problems by consistent dedication of sufficient funds, and by securing and sharing advice, and comparing practical experiences, with regard to effective yearly preventative maintenance programs, the development of long range grounds planning and productive energy conservation programs.

Busing of Students - Funding

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education assist with funding the busing of students to extra-curricular events, and provide incentives for savings on budget function #7 (transportation).

Rationale: There is a lack of recognition in funding for busing to extra curricular activities, which play an important role in the operation of small districts with limited educational services.

Busing of Students - Safety Inspections

Recommendation: That all districts implement effective inspection programs for their vehicles.

Rationale: It has been demonstrated in certain districts that daily bus inspections by each bus driver help keep the buses in good mechanical order, resulting in increased reliability and longer bus operating lives.

District Resource Centres (D.R.C.s) - Funding

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education acknowledge the significant educational contribution made by D.R.C.s in small school districts, and provide funding dedicated to appropriate professional staffing of D.R.C.s and improved D.R.C. delivery systems to outlying schools.

Rationale: The majority of B.C. small school districts operate D.R.C.s in a central location, and distribute acquired learning materials to individual schools. Collection sizes vary from 2,000-20,000 items, with 4,000-5,000 the norm. Collections consist primarily of videos, science kits, realia (three dimensional items), supplemental readers, maps, charts, teacher reference materials and computer software. (Most schools in small districts carry a limited quantity of kits, videos and computer software).

Staffing of D.R.C.s varies from one small school district to another. Nearly half have teacher-librarians and some clerical assistance; the others depend upon volunteers. Bus drivers usually deliver and return materials. There is little time available for cataloguing, and often inadequate knowledge of curriculum, resources and learning styles. Communication by D.R.C. staff with outlying schools is another frequent problem, as is maintenance of audio-visual equipment and other "technical" items.

District Resource Centres - P.E.M.C. Services

Recommendation: That the Ministry of Education expand the services of the Provincial Educational Media Centre, including the provision by P.E.M.C. of in-service training sessions for District Resource Centres' staff.

Rationale: Small school districts depend on the Provincial Educational Media Centre for all their low-cost, high quality items, plus the experience and leadership of P.E.M.C. personnel - they would be welcome in all small school districts to provide in-service training and information. Unfortunately cutbacks in funding in recent years have affected P.E.M.C. production of materials - small school districts need more access to such excellent projects as "Discovery British Columbia," "Thinking Together," "This Is My Home" series, etc. Funding is also needed to assist P.E.M.C. keep up to date with technology in communications and computers, and to provide improved P.E.M.C. cataloguing.

District Resource Centres - Information Exchange

Recommendation: That the D.R.C. staff of small school districts establish more formalized arrangements to exchange information and experiences.

Rationale: The regular sharing of information by D.R.C. staff helps them to improve the centres' operations, to become more involved in the establishment of minimum standards, and to promote increased awareness of the D.R.C.'s role within their districts.

Support Services Sub-Committee Members

Mr. R. Chambers, Superintendent, S.D. #10 (Arrow Lakes) - chairman.
Ms. A. McLeod, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #87 (Stikine).
Mr. T. Klotz, Secretary-Treasurer, S.D. #26 (North Thompson).
Ms. S. Chambers, District Resource Centre Librarian, S.D. #10 (Arrow Lakes).

CONCLUSION

After six months of studies and deliberations the Task Force has come to one overarching conclusion: there is no "once and for all" solution. What is required is ongoing attention to the needs of small school districts.

Not only is there no single answer to the districts' current difficulties, the problems themselves are subject to change. Staff and student populations move in or on, and the educational, financial, technical, and other environments in which the districts must operate alter.

That is why the report's major recommendations propose a small school district office within the Ministry of Education, and the establishment of regional service centres. They would provide continuity in helping small school districts assess their problems and find answers.

The November 2, 1987, conference for small school districts should help promote widespread understanding of the small districts' ongoing special situation, and that general problem-solving help is needed by the districts so they may exercise their responsibility to seek solutions on a continuing basis.